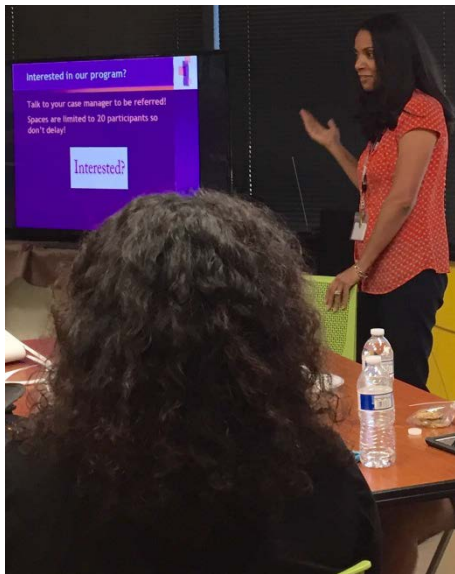


## IPS and the Wise Worker Program at San Fernando's Wellness Center

By Linda Stone-Abrams, LCSW; Victoria Lee, Ph.D.;  
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*Kecia Coker, OTD, OTR/L speaking about employment*

Wise Worker, an innovative program designed to help consumers improve their cognitive skills for employment, was highlighted on June 22, 2016 at San Fernando Mental Health Center. Thirty-nine consumers, family members, and staff attended the kick-off event for the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Pilot Project at San Fernando's Wellness Center. The pilot program combines the evidence-based IPS model of supported employment with cognitive remediation interventions from the Wise Worker program. The kick-off was a fun-filled event with food, prizes, giveaways, and inspirational speakers. Speakers included Dr. Victoria Lee from

Adult System of Care, Dr. Kecia Coker from CHEERD, Dr. Edward Armstrong from CalWORKs, and success stories shared by Walter J. and Angela L. The event was also attended by other employment related agencies such as the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program and the Verdugo Job Center.

*Walter J. shared his success story with support from his sister.*

The Wise Worker program addresses all aspects of cognition related to employment, including improving attention, concentration, processing speed, memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and social wisdom. The program has four components: (1) assessment of cognitive deficits expected to impact employment; (2) weekly computerized training with strategy coaching using BrainHQ exercises from the Posit Science Corporation; (3) a



bridging group with a structured, 24-week curriculum focused on cognitive skills development specific to the workplace; and (4) individualized interventions to help clients address specific cognitive deficits impacting employment. The curriculum is highly interactive, using real-life, simulated situations for skills development and practice. Group cognitive exercises also help participants develop and practice cognitive skills pertinent to the workplace.

The Wise Worker program and the accompanying treatment manual “Wise Worker Program: Developing the Cognitive Skills and Social Wisdom to Succeed in the Workplace” was developed and written by Linda Stone-Abrams, PSW II from Adult System of Care (ASOC), in consultation with Joseph Ventura, Ph.D. from the UCLA Center for Neurocognition and Emotion. Linda has been with DMH since 1999 and has always valued the importance of employment in the recovery process. In her experience as a case manager and clinician for over 20 years, she found that the majority of consumers want to work, but can have difficulty obtaining and maintaining meaningful, competitive jobs. Her clients did not seem to have much success with employment through traditional services or attending prevocational groups. When Linda joined ASOC in January 2015, she was given the assignment to help develop and implement the IPS Pilot Project. Kalene Gilbert, a Program Manager from ASOC at the time and Linda’s long-time mentor, had recently learned about research showing that IPS combined with as little as 12 weeks of cognitive interventions could dramatically improve employment outcomes. Kalene suggested a cognitive intervention program be included within the IPS pilot project, and that DMH develop its own model in-house that could be replicated in the future should the program prove to be successful.



*Linda Stone-Abrams,  
LCSW, clinical lead of the  
pilot project.*

Linda first became inspired about the value of cognitive remediation services through participating as a clinician and mentor trainer for the Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) pilot program at Arcadia Mental Health, which combined neurocognitive computer interventions and a structured social cognition group to address the negative symptoms of schizophrenia. The positive results experienced by consumers from the CET program were dramatic, with participants experiencing improved attention, memory, processing speed, communication and social skills, and enhanced capacity for education and employment. Seeing these results, Linda became a firm believer in the value of cognitive remediation

interventions. Thus, she developed the Wise Worker program taking many of these elements into consideration.

As part of researching the combined approach of cognitive remediation and IPS services, Linda met with Joseph Ventura, Ph.D. of the UCLA Center for Neurocognition and Emotion. An expert in the field of cognitive remediation, Dr. Ventura was one of the lead researchers in a study of individuals with first onset schizophrenia using a combination of IPS supported employment with cognitive training. Results showed significant improvements in work and school functioning for the participants involved in the study. When he heard about DMH's plans to implement a similar program within its Wellness Centers, Dr. Ventura enthusiastically agreed to become a consultant for the pilot project to guide staff on curriculum development and help analyze outcomes.

It is hoped the Wise Worker program in combination with IPS supported employment services will show success in the 3-year pilot project. Program staff at ASOC will carefully monitor outcomes, and if successful, this model of intervention could be spread to other programs within the Department of Mental Health. Implementation of the program has already begun at the two pilot sites, San Fernando and Rio Hondo [see "Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Coming to Rio Hondo's Wellness Center" article in the June 30, 2016 e-News].